

Career Path

Communicating at the right pitch

By Emma Jones



Communication
Specialist
Neil Flett
Chairman
Rogen International
Photo: Ringo Lee

When it comes to delivering a speech, presenting a business pitch or taking a seminar in front of a room full of people, most of us will admit to being scared stiff.

However, there has never been a time when it was so important for business leaders to ensure that they're effectively delivering their messages to the right audiences, at the right time and in the right way. And that's why more and more executives are turning to communication specialists for help.

"It's a very emotional and personal thing," says Neil Flett, chairman of Rogen International. "We can threaten someone with standing in front of a theatre of three hundred people and they'll be violently ill. We've even had people come to our programmes and be sick, just at the thought of having to stand up in front of others."

Rogen is a consultancy which specialises in working with business leaders to help them communicate persuasively in situations where a considerable amount rests on the outcome. Rogen teaches skills from presenting and negotiating to public speaking and dealing with the media. "It's high-stakes, because it usually involves a lot of money whether they get it right or wrong," says Mr Flett.

It's often a case of simply getting to the root of the problem and dealing with it at its most basic level, he explains. "We will take executives into public squares and stand them on boxes where they will have to speak to total strangers. We've even had them conducting orchestras with a baton to learn about gestures. We do the most outlandish things, but it's all about making them better."

Persuasive people

There is no typical career path if you want to become a communication specialist. Mr Flett started out as a newspaper journalist before moving into public relations, where he specialised in helping companies interface with the media. In 1987 he discovered Peter Rogen and Associates Group in New York and was so impressed by their methodology that he eventually acquired the company's Australian licence. Mr Flett now runs the Rogen organisation around the world.

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The most successful people in this career are those who have already had a considerable amount of experience in business.

"We hire business people, for example, who have worked in financial services, so that when we put them into a bank they know the language and how the organisation works," Mr Flett explains.

Rogen generally recruits professional staff from diverse backgrounds such as law, accountancy, management consulting, banking and HR. The company does not hire fresh graduates, as a rule, but prefers that applicants have a strong grounding in the business world.

By way of preparing for a career in this field, Mr Flett advocates getting involved with selling and

persuading. Studying people, watching how they interact, and seeing what physical characteristics make some people better communicators than others, is excellent training.

"Some of what we do is very profound," Mr Flett says. He himself finds the work enormously rewarding, especially when someone goes to him after a course and says he has changed their life. He may have turned them from being a shy and nervous person into someone with a confident personality.

Winning ways

Rogen, which is well established, serves more than just the business world. The company also does a lot of work in sport with its consultants training cricket and football teams and Olympic athletes. They help them communicate and give them the confidence to talk and react to the media.

"No one had ever shown them how to do that," says Mr Flett, adding, "the athletes we've trained might not win the most medals at Athens this year, but they'll certainly be the ones talking about it more than anyone else!"

Working at this level may not be representative of the profession as a whole, but Rogen's wide-ranging operations serve to underscore the diversity of a career as a communication specialist.

Above all else, Mr Flett says, what is essential for this particular career is a love of communication.

China Opportunities



As businesses continue to grow and develop in China, the need for more communication specialists will increase. Much of the work that Rogen already does in the country is with multinational companies dealing with people in the upper echelons of business. Rogen has never had as big a focus on China as it does right now. The company is already training a lot of people in Shanghai and Beijing, Mr Flett says.

"We plan to see many more, as everyone keeps telling me that business in China is exploding, and I think our biggest challenge will be finding the people to deliver it."

Career Path		
Principal Partner		Profit Share
Over 20 years of experience		
↑		
Senior Consultant		varies*
15-20 years of experience		
↑		
Consultant		varies*
10-15 years of experience		
↑		
Public Relations / Sales Manager		30-50K
5-10 years of experience		
↑		
Journalist		18-25K
3-5 years experience		

** For senior consultants and consultants pay is based on performance and sales. A successful consultant can make 80K per month.*

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